



Cross- Functional Brand Collaboration

How to Successfully Align Teams
(That Should Be) Working On Brand



With this guide, you'll gain insights into the importance of enabling teams to work collaboratively – across functions and departments – and share both goals and processes. Get some valuable how-to's, and find ways you can improve the way your organization works on brand-related topics internally and with external teams and partners, too.

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Why Cross-Functional Collaboration is Vital to Brand Management



You invested months of your time into creating a new brand identity. You tightened up your messaging, swapped out your fonts and even updated your design to better reflect your brand. And it's looking great! Your marketing department is implementing it exactly the way you envisioned. — But some of the teams in your organization seem to have missed the memo. While the new branding is popping up in your new marketing campaigns, your web development team is still using the old font and outdated CI/CD to build and update apps. Yikes! — Now, you not only need to go back and correct the app design issues, you also need to check on

every other team to make sure these types of mistakes aren't happening elsewhere. — Yeah, that can be incredibly frustrating and stressful. Especially if you don't know where the breakdown in communication was. — Luckily, there is a strategy you can use to minimize these problems in the future. Here, we'll talk about how you can use cross-functional collaboration to improve brand management across your organization.



What is Cross-Functional Collaboration?

Cross-functional collaboration is the process of bringing people together with different types and levels of expertise – internal and external – to work toward a common goal. However, cross-functional collaboration extends far beyond the limits of traditional team collaboration, by connecting people from different departments, teams, companies and sometimes different geographic locations and time zones – with various skill sets and job functions – to work toward a specific objective, together.

Why is Cross-Functional Collaboration Necessary for Brand Management?

While it may seem like there is little to no connection between the two, cross-functional collaboration is actually what makes effective brand management possible. Consider this: successfully managing your brand requires the buy-in and work from people across your organization. You need your marketing teams to roll out campaigns and produce collateral that are on-brand. You need HR to hire individuals that fit your company culture. You need sales representatives and frontline employees to embody your brand as they interact with customers. And so on. However, your employees can't effectively maintain your brand identity, by working in vacuums. Those that try, inevitably end up drifting away from the company vision or tweaking the branding to match

their own preferences and ideas. As a result, you end up with an inconsistent brand image and subpar brand experiences, as the core message and purpose of your brand is lost. On the flip side, by encouraging communication between employees and creating a shared sense of responsibility for brand projects, you can facilitate the creation of on-brand assets and, by extension, cohesive brand experiences.

How Does Cross-Functional Collaboration Impact Brand Management?

Though it's easy to see how working together could have an impact on the consistency of your brand, it can be difficult to identify the exact role it plays in brand management. So, to provide some clarity, we've compiled a few specific examples on how collaborating cross-functionally can help you manage your brand effectively.

1. It Keeps Brand Implementers (Internal & External) On the Same Page

No matter how big or small your organization is, in order to create authentic brand experiences, you should have multiple people managing your brand. This includes your interns, employees, independent contractors, partners, managers, executive teams, and external agencies. While this is great from a workload perspective, it can mean trouble for businesses that don't have a way to keep everyone in sync. The reason being: different ideas and



perspectives can dilute your branding and create an inconsistent brand image. However, when people from different departments and teams choose to communicate and collaborate, the story is very different. People with different responsibilities and objectives are able to work together to build the brand image, by using a shared set of company goals. Teams can co-create various types of branded assets – like advertisements, blog posts, graphics, packaging and product designs – to market the brand. And projects can be rolled out faster, with minimal risk that the content will need to be reworked or outright removed from customer view.

2. It Enables You to Build Rapport with Stakeholders

You know just how important it is to put your best foot forward with your partners, employees and freelancers. Not only does doing so affect the work they do for you, but it also plays a major role in their willingness to be advocates of your brand. (After all, they have friends, families, and access to the internet too.) But you can't build good rapport with them, if your communication, project management, and feedback loops leave a sour taste in their mouth. In fact, it'll probably have the opposite effect. Luckily, this isn't a permanent problem. By designing a plan to keep all employees in the loop and getting more people involved in important projects, the work will not only be a whole lot simpler, but stakeholders will also feel important and cared about. And that means more positive reviews for you on Google and Glassdoor, more name drops at holiday parties and more referrals to their partners and customers. In essence, lots and lots of free marketing.

3. It Allows for faster Innovation Cycles & Increased Speed to Market

With new trends constantly emerging, there's a lot of opportunity for brands to show off their style and connect with customers in new (and unique) ways. However, it can be difficult to balance innovation and creativity with brand consistency, when your window of opportunity is small. So how do you do it successfully? You get your teams to collaborate. You pull people from sales, marketing, product development, IT and HR to discuss new ideas and plan new initiatives. Having a mix of people with different backgrounds, priorities and preferences will increase the likelihood that the ideas that emerge will be on-brand and well thought out. It will also accelerate your speed to market, because you'll have multiple people problem-solving, thinking through roadblocks, and working on asset and product development.

4. It Helps You Avoid Faux Pas

The last thing businesses want to do is launch a product or a marketing campaign that flops. But unfortunately, it happens all the time. In some cases, this can be chalked up to a hasty timeline or siloed innovation. In others, it can be attributed to a poor approval process or lack of communication. Whatever the reason, the common thread is often the absence of collaboration. Take Tesla for example.



In 2019, they attempted to launch the Cybertruck as a modern alternative to the traditional models manufactured by Toyota and Ford. However, at the official unveiling, there was a serious disconnect between the sales pitch for the product and its actual functionality. This became painfully apparent as Elon Musk boasted the unbreakable nature of the truck's windows and then proceeded to nearly shatter one with a metal ball. Naturally, both the product and Tesla's brand took a hit. However, this wasn't an unavoidable situation. Had the sales and marketing team been in the loop on the actual structural integrity of the windows, they likely wouldn't have told Musk to demonstrate it in such a bold fashion. Bottom line: cross-functional collaboration isn't just a nice-to-have facet of your brand management work. It's a necessary strategy that will help you avoid all sorts of missteps and faux pas, including tone deaf advertising, poor customer experiences, and product designs that are rolled out before their MVP is reached.

5. It's Brand Management in Action

Brand management is about a lot more than just creating on-brand products, services and assets. It's about designing experiences that support and highlight your branding. It's embodying your brand in every interaction with stakeholders. And that means your employees too. In some ways, this can be a lot more difficult than simply rolling out branded products or designing social media campaigns, though. After all, how are you supposed to brand the daily employee experience? It all comes down to your company culture and the way you implement your values. Think about it this way: your culture and

core values drive the interactions you have with your employees on a daily basis (or at least they should). But this can extend far beyond office pleasantries. By implementing internal processes that match your values and fit the company culture you're trying to build, you'll be able to actually brand the experience your employees have in their meetings and day-to-day work. Consider Disney, for a minute. With 12 theme parks across the world, they need thousands of front line employees to interact with guests, clean up trash, run concession stands, and manage the operation of rides. But Disney doesn't go the traditional route when it comes to defining job functions at their parks or giving their employees responsibility. In fact, they think of their employees as physical representations of their brand. As a result, each and every one is called a "cast member" and given a part to play. They wear costumes, speak and point in specific ways, and occasionally dance and sing for park guests. Making front line employees a critical part of the brand experience (not just logistics) doesn't only make the parks magical for visitors, though. It has actually made Disney a really popular and desirable place to work.



The truth is, managing a brand today can be incredibly difficult – especially as your business grows and your external partnerships expand. However, by getting people across your organization to communicate and collaborate, you’ll be able to do it with a lot less headache.



Brand Teams: How to Successfully Set Up Cross- Functional Teams



A brand lives in all corners of an organization. And each and every employee plays a role in its overall creation and management.

Web designers and developers create digital assets like websites and apps. Content creators and marketers put together marketing campaigns that target the audience's pain points. Salespeople and front line employees represent the brand in their interactions with customers. And so on. However, with people demanding more holistic brand experiences, these teams can't afford to work in isolation. Their projects must come together seamlessly to provide a consistent, positive experience for the customer. Sure, it can be challenging to get your teams to work together. And not because they have different goals,

responsibilities and job functions, either. The fact is, people struggle to check their egos at the door, step outside their comfort zones, and trust others. They're much more apt to work independently or (if they have to) in small groups with like-minded individuals. So how do you, the person tasked with orchestrating it all, get the teams in your organization to collaborate cross-functionally? There are a few ways. And we'll break each of them down for you, below. But first, let's discuss some of the benefits that cross-functional collaboration can have on a brand. You know, to lift your spirits and give you a little motivation.



Benefits to Cross-Functional Collaboration

There are lots of specific benefits brands get from cross-functional collaboration. However, the majority can be summed up in three categories.

1. Consistency Across Brand Asset Creation

If you want people to have a good perception of your brand, you need to be consistent. Your voice needs to sound the same in all of your content, and your digital assets need to look alike. Cross-functional collaboration makes it easier to keep everything in sync, because it keeps everyone on the same page. With cross-functional collaboration, teams can share their work and participate in feedback loops more frequently. They can communicate about branding updates and brainstorm new ideas, together. The result? Out-of-date assets (like logos) pop up in public spaces less often and projects from different teams fit together to form richer experiences for customers, with every brand touchpoint.

2. Faster Iteration & Innovation

Trends move quickly. That means, companies have to move fast if they don't want to be left behind. But this can be difficult to do, if teams and individuals work separately. Beyond hitting mental blocks and running out of creative juice, innovating in a vacuum can lead to a whole host of problems, including wasted resources, product duds, and marketing faux pas. Cross-functional collaboration changes the game, by getting people to think and talk about a

problem from lots of different perspectives. By brainstorming together, these teams can bounce ideas off each other and layer their ideas into full-fledged concepts for products and campaigns. They can also clean up errors and spot problems with an idea, before too much time is wasted developing it. Once the development phase starts, cross-functional collaboration can also help teams iterate more quickly. Projects can be split and shared among different people on the team, and everyone can participate in the feedback loop to make sure revision rounds are as effective and complete as possible.

3. Better Output

Ultimately, the point is to successfully create and launch something that will benefit the brand. As Justine Metz, head of Global Wealth Management Marketing at Bank of America, explains, "The potential benefits to the customer and the business, of providing better solutions to the client, far outweigh the team integration challenges. It may take longer, but you get to a better result." Why? Because you have more perspectives and ideas in the room to cross-check content, designs, and products. Having multiple sets of eyes enables you to verify that an asset will help (and not hurt) the brand, before they ever reach the public.



How to Set Up Collaboration Between Internal Teams

Now that we've reviewed some of the benefits of cross-functional collaboration, let's get to it. Here's our step-by-step method to setting up successful cross-functional teams that will help you create an overall better brand experience.

1. Make Introductions

It's a well-established fact that people who don't know each other don't work as well together as people with good working relationships. And you don't need to look any further than sports teams to see it. In fact, whether we're talking about European football clubs, American basketball teams or any other athletic group – we can easily attribute success to good team chemistry. The reason being: teams with good chemistry know how to communicate, how to make seamless handoffs, and how to cover for one another. More than that, they're also able to successfully make adjustments to the game strategy in the moment. This same lesson can be applied in business settings as well. The better people on a cross-collaborative team know each other, the better they're able to communicate, work together, handoff responsibilities, and make adjustments to the project scope and timeline, as needed. For this reason, it's vital to prioritize introductions and get-to-know-you experiences both before a cross-collaborative team

comes together and shortly after their project kicks off. You can do this in lots of different ways, like encouraging water-cooler conversations or simply discussing priorities, goals, and preferences.

2. Hold a Kickoff Meeting

Once you're ready to get the project underway, you should gather the team together and hold a kickoff meeting. This is the time to discuss your vision for the project and set clear goals for reaching it. It's also an ideal time to assign roles, discuss the division of labor for the project and get everyone the right level of access in your brand management platform. That way, you spend less time fielding questions and working out logistics, later on. This doesn't need to be a three to four hour meeting, though. It's just intended to give the team some direction before they jump into their work.



3. Make Brand Knowledge Shareable

A major trap businesses fall into with cross-functional collaboration is forgetting to make all necessary assets and information available to the team. This might be specific brand assets like logos and images or it might be guidelines for the brand voice and design. Whatever the case, forgetting to give your cross-functional team everything they need at the outset of the project can lead to a slow down in project momentum, as team members wait for brand managers to send over assets and answer questions about their use. One of the easiest ways to combat this is to use a brand management platform. With one, you can create, modify, save, store, and share brand assets in the cloud and give your teams direct access to them. This means, they can view and use those assets, on demand, without any extra hand-holding.

4. Create Communication Channels

No matter where your team members are located – or how far away they're located – communication channels need to be clear and open to everyone on the team. People need to know how to get questions answered, how to give updates and request feedback, and even how to share a quick win with the rest of the team. This is especially important for cross-functional teams who are less likely to bump into each other in a regular office setting or in virtual department meetings. That said, it's not enough to

put together a spreadsheet with everyone's preferred method of contact. Communicating that way is simply too complicated. Instead, cross-functional teams should come to an agreement about the communication channel everyone on the team will use for the duration of the project (at least, when communicating with each other). Not only will doing so cut down on communication lags, but it can also eliminate confusion about how to reach people.

5. Set Up a Collaborative Workspace

With team members spread out – both across office spaces and time zones – it can be difficult to work together. This is especially true, if everyone on the team is using a different tool to do their work. While this can't entirely be avoided, since very few developer tools have the right capabilities for creating marketing campaigns, there should be an overlap somewhere. In essence, the team should have a shared workspace where they can iterate, leave feedback, edit and share deliverables. Not only does having one simplify the work itself, by allowing everyone to work on the most recent iteration of the project, but it also streamlines the approval process. And that means faster project execution and quicker publication. In addition to its capabilities to create, store, and share brand assets, Frontify doubles as a workspace for teams to work on digital assets, leave comments, and approve versions – making it an ideal choice for cross-collaborative teams.



Cross-functional collaboration can be incredibly difficult to set up, especially for businesses who've never done it successfully before. But it's not impossible. By following the tips and tricks above, you'll be one step closer to building solid cross-functional brand teams.



Brand Objectives: How to Align Different Teams to Meet Your Goals



When we talk about goal setting in the workplace, we often refer to setting quarterly or annual performance targets. However, this type of goal setting doesn't always get employees to work together to better the brand. In fact, in some cases, it actually draws deeper lines of separation between departments, teams and employees, as each person focuses on their own objectives, performance and outcomes.

That doesn't mean we can just do away with workplace goals, though. After all, they're a powerful catalyst for progress and achievement. So how do we make workplace goal setting beneficial, not just to individual people and teams, but our brands as well? Simple. We set brand objectives.



What are brand objectives?

Not unlike other types of goals, brand objectives are all about providing people, namely employees, with something to work toward. However, brand objectives do differ from other types of workplace goals in one major way: Rather than giving people or teams a specific goal to track their performance, brand objectives provide a shared set of goals for the entire organization. These objectives exist to keep everyone focused on the big picture (i.e., the brand) while they work, so that all projects add something positive to the brand image. Put a little more simply, brand objectives keep people from just aimlessly producing digital assets. When implemented properly, they give teams (including cross-functional teams) a framework for creating content, code, designs and products that move the brand closer to its ideal.

How do you set brand objectives?

Despite being a different type of goal setting, brand objectives are actually quite easy to set. In fact, for the most part, the process for setting brand objectives is the same as setting other types of goals. However, there are always tips and tricks you can use to max out your effectiveness. So here are our top 3 tips to absolutely nail it the first go-around.

1. Work Backward

When people set goals, they start by thinking about where they want to end up. The same goes here – except, instead of looking at an individual, isolated outcome, you start with the big, overarching objective. In other words, you focus on where you ultimately want your brand to be. This might mean pinpointing the perception you want people to have about your brand or determining the optimal (but still realistic) level of brand awareness. It might even involve borrowing from your business goals and focusing your attention on capturing a specific market segment or bringing in a certain amount of revenue. There is quite a wide range of options. The point is to have a target, or targets, that the entire company can work toward. From here, you can start to work backward, looking at specific things that need to be accomplished on a departmental level to reach your overall brand goals. Then, you can focus on goals for different teams that will help the department reach its goals. This is also a great time to look at cross-functional team goals, as these feed directly into your brand objectives as well. Once you've set goals at both the department and team levels, you can encourage your employees to set their own goals that will propel them (and by extension the team, department and organization) closer to the desired end result. Together, these goals layer into a nuanced set of goals and objectives that support the overall brand objective. Just make sure that, at each goal setting level, you keep the ultimate objective in mind. This will keep you from drifting away from it, as you dive deeper into each department, team and person's contribution.



2. Set Deadlines

Deadlines inspire motivation. That's one of the big reasons why we use them. They keep people move. On the flip side, when there are no deadlines, procrastination can creep in. People push things off and essentially fall into the mindset of "I'll get to it tomorrow." That's why it's crucial to have deadlines when setting your brand objectives. It keeps everyone focused and progressing toward a long-term, company wide goal. However, there is a caveat. In order to be effective, these deadlines must be reasonable. If they're too close, your employees will face burnout and discouragement. And if they're too far away, you can end up with an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality. So what do you do? You get your deadlines as close as you can to being "just right" for the long-term brand objective you set, and you use departmental, team and individual goals to give your employees something short-term to work toward.

3. Keep Everyone Accountable

In order to combat the difficulties of sticking to long-term goals, like dieting or exercising, people often turn to accountability partners. These accountability partners are responsible for making sure the goal setter follows the plan and doesn't skip leg day. And often, this pays off tremendously. In fact, according to Entrepreneur, people are more likely to accomplish their goals when they share them with others – 65% likely to be exact. And if they're actually held accountable by their accountability partners, via different types of check in meetings, that likelihood

skyrockets to 95%. Why mention this? Because it's applicable to brand objectives as well. By sharing their brand related goals with others and finding people to keep them accountable – like managers – your employees are much more likely to achieve them. The same goes for teams and departments. And since all of your employees are really working toward the same end goal, each person should have a stake in the success of other employees, teams, and departments. After all, you ultimately win or lose as a company.



Getting your teams to work together to build a brand can be challenging, especially since people are more inclined to focus on their own work and goals. However, this isn't a permanent condition. By setting brand objectives, you can get the goals and work of your teams aligned, while also getting their mindset in sync.

Brand Stewardship: Collaboration Over Management



Customers expect to have the same positive experience with a brand every time they come into contact with it. They want to see the same colors, read the same type of tone in content, watch the same style of videos, have the same virtual experiences, and so on. This can put a lot of pressure on businesses to perform. And the people who often feel that pressure most acutely are the brand managers – the ones inside the organization who are tasked with managing all of the brand’s touchpoints and making everything come together into a seamless experience for customers. But, it shouldn’t be this way. And in fact, it doesn’t have to be this way.

By delegating some of the responsibility of managing the brand, brand managers can alleviate the pressure they feel and start functioning as actual managers, rather than wearing tons of different hats. This sharing of brand stewardship, so to speak, can also help them ensure that employees are invested and participating in the brand management process.



What is Brand Stewardship?

Before we get into brand stewardship, let's dig into the term "stewardship" a little bit. Put simply, a stewardship is a responsibility. It's a trust given to a person to care for someone or something in the stead of the person it belongs to. For instance, a child could be given stewardship over a family pet, like a goldfish (or a 500 lb tiger). As its steward, the child is responsible to feed it, clean its bowl (likely with some help from a parent or guardian), and protect it from disturbances, like the family cat. This stewardship gives the child responsibility for something the whole family enjoys, while getting the child invested in the growth, happiness, and life of the goldfish. This principle can be applied perfectly to a brand and business as well. You don't have to give your employees goldfish to keep on their desks, though. Instead, you can give employees shared responsibility over your brand. These responsibilities will vary in scope and size, but all can be given with the expectation that employees will carefully use the resources and tasks entrusted to them to maintain the integrity of your brand. In the past, employees only had one way to be good brand stewards. They could make sure specific brand assets were, well, on-brand. But as the concept of a brand experience has taken shape, it's become important for the definition to expand. Today, brand stewardship involves all aspects of your brand – from the obvious, like infusing color schemes and designs into your marketing campaigns, to the less often considered, like chatbots and embodying your company values in every interaction with customers.

Who's Responsible for Brand Stewardship?

The truth is, creating a brand experience is too big a job for a few people. It simply isn't possible for a small team to create and cross-check all digital assets, develop every on-brand product, and represent the brand to every customer. Good brand stewardship requires the buy-in and co-creative work of employees and executives at every level. Everyone needs to be involved. Not only does doing so make a huge difference in the workload of brand managers and their teams, but it also drastically increases employee buy-in on the branding.

Why Does Brand Stewardship Need to be a Collaborative Effort?

While we've already discussed several reasons why the collaborative nature of brand stewardship is better than traditional brand management, there are a few amazing benefits that we've yet to point out. Here are three major ways that brand stewardship can positively impact your brand.



Aligns Employees Across the Organization

One big pain point that organizations face is lack of alignment between departments and teams – and the inevitable branding chaos that ensues. Brand stewardship not only unites teams by giving them a common goal to work toward (i.e., a solid brand experience), but also by giving them specific responsibilities that move the entire organization closer to that goal.

Gets Employees More Invested in Your Brand

The more you care about something, the more effort you're going to put into it. This applies whether we're talking about a fitness goal, a hobby, or a job. Brand stewardship gets your employees invested in your brand, by giving them a meaningful responsibility – and an opportunity to make a difference. And the more invested they are in your brand, the more likely they are to create powerful on-brand assets and embody your brand values in their interactions with customers.

Future-Proofs the Brand

Building a brand takes a lot of work – and it can be scary to think that the whole thing could fall apart if you were to move on or if one of your team members were to leave. Brand stewardship virtually eliminates this risk, by spreading the responsibility of your brand across hundreds (or thousands) of people. In this case, any number of your employees could move on, move up or change roles and your brand identity would stay intact.

How to Make Brand Stewardship Everyone's Responsibility

1. Develop a Plan

Before you can turn your employees into brand stewards, you need to develop a plan. And not just a generic “the marketing team will handle marketing and the R&D team will handle R&D,” plan, either. It needs to be specific. You can do this by figuring out exactly what stewardship you want each of your employees to have over your brand. For instance, you can ask yourself:



- What role will this person fill? Will they be working on assets and collateral, hiring new employees or building new products?
- Will this person have regular interactions with customers and leads? Or will they work more in the background?
- What brand information do they need to be successful? Do they need brand assets like logos, image folders, and color schemes? Do they need the brand voice guide?
- How large a role do they play? Will they be working on a team or individually?
- Do they need support from other teams and departments in the organization?
- Do you need to create cross-functional teams for specific projects or responsibilities?
If so, who do you need for those responsibilities?

Once you figure out exactly what everyone will do and map out what they need to do it, successfully, you can start getting your employees involved.

2. Facilitate Employee Buy-In

To get your employees invested in their specific stewardship, you need to help them see the value in it. So take a little time to explain that to your employees. Point out the purpose of their specific responsibilities and share the impact that their responsibilities can have on the brand. The point is to get everyone excited, because the more excited they are about their stewardship, the more effective your plan will be.

3. Share Brand Assets

One of the last things you need to do before getting underway, is make sure everyone has complete, continuous access to the assets and people they need to be successful. The reason being: it enables employees to create and roll out on-brand projects, without requiring brand managers and marketers to spend all of their time doing tedious tasks – like sending brand assets to different individuals and teams and answering questions about asset use. All you need to do is create a shared space, which all employees can access, where the most up-to-date versions of your brand assets (and the guidelines for using each one) are stored. This will ensure that they have the tools they need to be successful.

4. Give Feedback & Rewards

While getting more responsibility for the brand may be an exciting prospect for many of your employees, the transition will not be perfect. There will be misunderstandings about responsibilities and mistakes made with the execution. So, offer feedback. Correct mistakes. Provide suggestions for improvement. Doing so will help your teams become better brand stewards over time. Since this will likely feel like an extra expectation put on them, you also need to make sure your employees feel valued for the contributions they're making. You can praise them, offer high-value rewards or celebrate as an organization. The point is to do what motivates and invigorates your employees. Don't forget to recognize the "smaller" contributions, too. Remember, even small things can change a customer's mind about your brand.



Making sure brand stewardship is an organization-wide thing can be incredibly challenging, especially if you're trying to implement it across your organization. However, with so many rewards on the table (the least of which being less emails asking about brand assets), it's so worth it.



Branding Tool Stack: Making Cross-Functional Collaboration Work



From selecting people and building workflows to setting objectives and measuring performance, there are a lot of things that go into cross-functional collaboration. But often, we spend so much time thinking about the people and workflow we need for a particular cross-functional project, that we neglect to build a toolstack that will make those people and that workflow success-ful. As a result, projects repeatedly hit roadblocks, as teams stop working to pin down tools they can use to streamline the work and make their communication simpler. This, of course, leads to slower asset creation and longer lead times.

But, as you well know, it doesn't have to be this way. It's entirely possible to find and integrate the right tools into a cross-functional workflow, before the team even starts a project. The trick is knowing what types of tools they need and the best options available in each of the categories. So, to help you get started, we've compiled a list of must-have tools for crossfunctional collaboration. Real quick, though. Let's talk about some important things you should know about toolstacks – namely why you need one and what things you should consider when building it.



Why is it important to have a designated toolstack?

While this may seem a little straightforward, the point of a toolstack is to have a specific set of tools, apps, and software that you use to access assets, communicate with others, and do your job well. But toolstacks can operate on a much larger scale too – providing the entire organization with a standard set of tools for the work that employees do. That means, instead of bouncing from Slack to Gmail to communicate with other departments, you can reach everyone in the same channel. It also means you can avoid toggling between SaaS tools like Google Docs and Dropbox to manage your assets, because everyone uses the same platform to store and share documents. Why does this matter from a cross-functional standpoint? Because if all of your teams and departments are using the exact same tools, everything from communication to collaboration can happen seamlessly. And this is true, whether you're forming specific cross-functional teams to handle a project, or if you're simply trying to break down silos and facilitate better collaboration between departments.

What factors should you consider when building your toolstack?

The sky's the limit when it comes to selecting tools and apps for your toolstack. However, you do need to be thoughtful and strategic about the tools you pick. The reason being: these tools will heavily impact the work your team does, and the flashiest tools

won't always provide the right functionality. So, here are some factors you should consider when deciding on tools for your toolstack.

1. Do they integrate?

A good toolstack will allow you to share data between tools easily. If there are major hiccups and roadblocks to data sharing or app communication, something needs to change.

2. Do they meet the needs of your team?

Technology may seem cool, but if it doesn't actually help your team, it probably isn't the best option. After all, the point of tools is to help your team be more productive. So, when deciding on tools for your toolstack, think about the applications for your team. Here are some questions to consider:

- Do you need a robust tool, or would you be better off with something lightweight?
- Does it do all the things you need it to do, or would using it force you to compromise some pretty important needs?
- What functionality is most important to your team? Is that one of the primary functions of the tool you're considering?

While this list of questions is by no means comprehensive, it will give you a great place to start as you weigh your options.



3. Are they intuitive?

Unless a tool provides a must-have function for your team, it's not worth it to pick one with a high learning curve. You simply won't have the time to master it. And that means, you'll either be paying for something you aren't taking full advantage of, or you'll lose time trying to learn the tool as you use it. Keep in mind that passing on these types of tools doesn't mean you're sacrificing functionality. A tool can be robust and easy-to-use at the same time.

4. How many users can they support?

If you're planning to have people across your organization use a specific tool, you need to make sure it has the capacity to support that many users. Otherwise, you'll end up switching tools part way through the project. Not good. You also need to make sure that the tool provides the right functionality to the right people. In some cases, you'll want certain employees to have greater access than others. If the tool doesn't allow for this, you may want to look for another option.

What are the Must-Haves for Your Toolstack?

Even with this framework, it can be difficult to know exactly what tools are best for collaborative projects. Here, we've compiled a list of powerful apps, platforms and tools that not only work well together, but also provide a lot of functionality to cross-functional teams.

Brand Management Tools

In order to successfully tackle cross-functional projects, your teams need to be clear on your branding. That includes everything from colors and fonts to voice and image guidelines. However, it can take a lot of work to get your teams up to speed. And often, it's the brand managers and marketing leads who are tasked with responding to the endless Slack messages and emails. Luckily, there is a simpler (and honestly, a nearly automated) way to give everyone access to the brand assets and guidelines. All you need is brand management software. Brand management software allow you to keep all of your brand assets – like logos, color palettes, fonts, and a whole lot more – in one online space. With brand management tools, you can create and modify important brand assets and give employees the freedom to access and use them in pre approved ways. This ensures that the integrity of the brand assets are maintained, as they're infused into various campaigns and products.



So what are your options for brand management tools?

For many businesses, one way is simply to build a custom brand management platform in-house. This guarantees that they have all the functionality they need. However, custom brand management platforms can take lots of time and money to develop – something not all businesses have. In addition, it also forces you to keep the platform constantly up-to-date on brand management best practices, for it to be even remotely close to the functionality of the ones built by market leaders. If a custom solution sounds unreasonable, a great option is a brand management tool like Frontify. With Frontify, you can create and modify brand assets in a secure cloud. Once you're happy with those assets, you can easily share them with cross-functional teams across your organization, so that they can be used in various campaigns and collateral. That doesn't mean you have to trust your employees with editable assets, though. In fact, with Frontify, you can lock each of your brand assets in their most current version, so that nothing important is stretched, squeezed, or inverted when it's used.

Design Tools

Whether you're a designer on a cross-functional team or a cross-functional team with a designer, you need to have a design tool. It's a non-negotiable. Not only will having one enable your designer to do their

best work, but it will also allow you to actually see your projects come to life, rather than simply daydreaming about how great they'll look.

So what are your options for design tools?

The truth is, this is something that should be left up to your designers – since, you know, they'll be the ones using it. However, there are some really popular (and powerful) options out there for you to choose from. For instance, Sketch. Being a go-to solution for many designers, Sketch is widely used for UI, app and wireframe designing. The interface is intuitive, and all designs are created in vector formats, making it easy to size things up and down without losing any clarity. Sketch is also a great tool for cross-collaborative teams, because you can share designs easily and receive feedback from collaborators directly in the file. You can even loop in developers at different stages of the design process, so they can get started on their work, too. Another awesome option is Adobe's InDesign tool. Built for page layouts, print collateral and digital media, InDesign allows designers to quickly and easily create assets of all different sorts. With completely customizable elements, they can infuse the right color schemes, use on-brand images, and even change the font to match your brand style guide. InDesign is also a solid choice for cross-collaborative teams, because you can share PDF versions, leave feedback, and request edits directly in the file. The other popular Adobe design tool is Adobe XD. Not unlike Sketch, Adobe XD is all about designing UX and UI for things like websites,



apps, games and even voice interfaces. However, XD does have some pretty unique features. For one, you can co-edit designs in real-time. You can also build in animations and microinteractions to make your designs pop. Best of all, in addition to its co-editing feature, XD allows for project sharing and in file feedback. Last, but certainly not least, on our list is Figma. As a UX design tool, Figma is great for all sorts of web, plugin and app projects. Its tools are really easy to use – often just taking a few clicks or a click-and-drag. It even has some automated features to make designing less tedious and repetitive. And with Figma you can loop in anyone you need to to get feedback, including your developers.

Communication Tools

If you hear someone say cross-functional collaboration, you likely hear the word “communication” in the same breath. The reason being: communication is vital to the success of cross-functional collaboration. The trouble is, it’s really difficult to get people to communicate. It’s even harder if your team is made up of people from different departments or people located in different time zones. So how do you get people talking? You pick a communication tool they’ll like and use. The right communication tool will allow everyone to stay in the loop and communicate with the right people, as needed.

So what are your options for communication tools?

There are honestly a lot out there to choose from. But we have one that we think is a great option no matter how big or small your cross-functional team is. Slack. Ever present. Ever popular. Ever useful. Slack is essentially an instant messaging app for businesses. With Slack, you can create threads for certain groups of people (like say, a cross-functional team) and keep all the chatter and discussion about the project in one place. You can save or send files, respond with emojis, and mention people specifically to make sure they get your message. And Slack even has a mobile app, so you can continue planning and discussing your projects, even when you’re away from your computer.

Content Management Tools

The same way a cross-functional project can’t function without a design tool, it can’t get off the ground without content management software (CMS). After all, the CMS is what ultimately rolls out any website or blog related project and gets it in front of your audience. With a content management tool, your teams can create, manage, and publish content of all sorts to your website. This includes everything from images and text to videos and graphics.



So what are your options for content management tools?

As with the design tools, you really should lean on your marketers and content managers to decide on this one. But, here are some of the more well-known and well-loved options out there. First of all, WordPress. Used by over 75 million different people and organizations, WordPress is one of the most common CMS tools out there. And it's no surprise as to why. WordPress is highly customizable – making it easy to transfer your branding onto the site itself and infuse it into all of the content you publish. With WordPress, you can also use lots of different plugins to enhance the experience for your site visitors. And all of your teammates can access it, which means the team can literally share the responsibility for the tool and the content published through it. As a leader in the CMS space, Episerver is another great option for businesses of all sizes. Its CMS is built for efficiency, making it easy to create and publish content, regularly. In fact, Episerver actually offers one of the best digital experiences to its users – as it's constantly improving. And Episerver actually comes with a built in Commerce Cloud, which enables businesses with ecommerce products to manage their digital presence and storefront as well. Not unlike the other two, Contentful offers a lot of functionality with managing content. However, Contentful goes well beyond managing content on a website. In fact, using an intricate system of APIs, Contentful allows you to manage content in every digital space, all from one platform. So, in essence, you can work on your website, social media posts, and other types of marketing campaigns, all in one spot. Not only does this make it easier for the marketers and content managers on your team to keep track of everything, but it also allows multiple people to use it for a variety of purposes.

Marketing Tools

Don't worry! We didn't forget about marketing tools. After all, it's the marketing tools that ultimately help you get your project in front of your audience. With marketing tools, you can do lots of different things, like collect leads, manage customer data, build customer profiles, design the customer journey, create marketing collateral, and run marketing campaigns.

So what are your options for marketing tools?

Honestly, this list would probably be longer than all the others – even if we were to just focus on the most robust, all encompassing options. However, we believe that one of the best options out there is Segment, so we'll just focus on that one and let you do any additional research you want. Segment is one of many marketing tools that essentially function as a “jack of many trades.” From gathering customer data to building customer profiles, this tool does a lot. Using APIs, you can pull data on your customers from virtually all of your digital touchpoints, like social media, websites, apps, chatbots, instant messaging platforms, and even CRMs. Once you've collected this data, you can create rich avatars that track your leads' interaction with your brand and see their overall value. This can help cross-functional teams figure out how new campaigns need to look and who the campaigns should target.



Building a toolstack that can support cross-collaboration may seem overwhelming and difficult at first, but by thoughtfully and intentionally selecting tools that both match the needs of your teams and work together seamlessly, you'll have exactly what you need to make collaboration successful. When you're looking for software to fit every team's needs, make sure it seamlessly integrates with the rest of your toolstack.



What Now?

Now that you've learned a thing or two about how to align teams –improving the way you manage your brand – it might be a good idea to put that into practice. If you're not quite familiar with Frontify, you can start your journey by setting up a demo with an expert, or read up on key features with our whitepaper. If you're already using Frontify, be sure to reach out to us and ask how you can use the software to allow teams to work more collaboratively.

[Try Frontify for Free](#)

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